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ABSTRACT

As colleges and universities become increasingly aware of students' need for assistance in career planning, conventional "placement" programs have been pressed into service to provide such assistance. One of the main problems expressed by placement and counseling center directors in this regard is that students fail to seek help in career planning until it is too late. One approach to solution of this problem is a Career-Oriented Intake Interview program. An "Intake" program was initiated at the University of Detroit in the Winter of 1974-75 as its response to attract students to career planning facilities prior to the start of college study. Between January and June, more than 150 high school seniors responded to the program by participating in career planning interviews while still attending high school. It will be the objective of this presentation to describe this approach in light of relevant career theory and practices. The origin of the intake idea and its career-planning, academic advising, and new student orientation context are discussed. Career theory and life-planning techniques of John Holland, Dick Bolles, John Crystal and others are presented as a theoretical framework for the interviews. The intake interview itself is described in detail, and the first year progress of the pilot project is discussed. (Author)

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Career-Oriented College Intake Interviews- An Alternative to "Emergency Room" Career Planning

Presented at the Michigan Personnel and Guidance Association annual convention
Detroit, Michigan November 3, 1975

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With the development of a new career planning area within the University's Cooperative Education and Placement office, it was quite clear that there existed a two-fold problem in career/life planning: students who sought assistance needed to be given effective assistance, and needy but unaware students had to be motivated to seek help. It seemed that our situation was akin to that of the medical missionary in Portuguese Guinea - the problem was not simply to provide healing, but to educate the villagers to recognize sickness, and to help them believe that they need not live under its burden.

As operational priorities were discussed, equal consideration was given to treatment and education. Because prevention is usually more efficient than cure, the decision was made to attempt to work with prospective freshmen while they were still in high school. In this way, the idea of college as a career development process could be presented to the student prior to the orientation and advising process. In the process, it was hoped that common misconceptions which often block effective academic planning and satisfaction in the freshmen year could be eliminated, thus opening the way for personal career development without a precipitating crisis of reality shock, and the time wasted until this crisis is reached. Some of these common misconceptions, later affirmed in an ACT study (1) include the false beliefs that

a) The earlier one chooses a major and a life goal, the better off they are. Certainly college freshmen ought to have a pretty good idea.

b) One aims at a specific job, prepares for it in college, then spends a lifetime performing it.

c) Vocation is a matter of determination, rather than fit between person and work situation.

d) It does not matter what a student studies in college. There is demand in the world of work for college graduates.

It was, of course, expected that this early contact would make the prospective students aware of our programs, facilities, and functions as freshmen, and would increase their awareness of the need for career planning throughout college, rather than during the senior year (2).

PROCEDURE

The "intake" idea was enthusiastically endorsed by the College of Arts & Sciences, but not seen as suitable at the time by the other colleges. It was decided to proceed with the plan for that one college, as a pilot study.

Beginning in January, those high school seniors who had been admitted to the College of Arts and Sciences for the following fall term were sent a mailing from one of the two career counselors in the Division of Career Planning, Cooperative Education, and Placement. In-town students received a letter encouraging them to call in and make an appointment for a personal interview to discuss career ideas and plans. One counselor also enclosed a pre-interview survey which included a self-rating grid rendering a comparision of personal preference of Holland's Occupational Theme (3), and questions regarding motivation for college, alternative careers, and life goals.

After one month, those who had not called in were contacted by telephone and encouraged to come in for the interview. Out of town students were invited, but not encouraged, because of distance the incovenience of travel.

During the interviews, which lasted from twenty-five minutes to one hour, the following topics were covered:

- the critical importance of individuality in planning one's career (supported by the occupational theme preferences, when available).
- motivation for college - the availability of time to explore vs. the perceived need to start immediately on the "right" major.

- alternative career plans through college as a flexible posture to deal with the quickly changing job market.
- life goals and values, and their part in the process of career development
- introduction to the college advising system, and composition of a report to the college will help the college match the student with a college advisor on the basis of present needs, rather than on an often premature "major declaration".
- a tour of our office services and facilities, including career research center, career testing services, cooperative education and placement assistance in all colleges.

Career planning files, containing interview summaries, college advisor report form, and the pre-interview survey, if used, were retained by each counselor for later follow-up.

College advisor report forms were sent to the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, to be used as a basis for advisor selection.

DISCUSSION

Slightly more than half of the in-town students come in for the intake interview. The students contacted, however, included all admitted students, many of whom will attend other universities. It is expected that this group of those who were interviewed will comprise approximately two-thirds of the commuting students who eventually enroll.

Efforts are being made to work with the remaining commuting and resident students through summer orientation and early Fall workshops.

Students responded enthusiastically to the interviews and were usually grateful for the clarification of academic responsibilities and career opportunities. While most were concerned about major declaration, requirement, and such as the interview began, the return to these concerns toward the end of the interview

seemed to show a notable increase in self-awareness and reflective attitude toward career ideas. The desire to explore, with or without a major idea, was an almost universal source of enthusiasm. It seems that a large part of the effectiveness of the interviews arose from the clarification of major declaration as a development during college, rather than an event preceding it.

Evaluation is only affective at this point, and will be followed by study during the coming year. It would appear, however, that the idea of career-oriented intake has significant benefit, not only to undecided freshmen, but to all freshmen, and transfer students as well.

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